

AN INTERVIEW WITH

**Ward Larsen,
Author of *Stealing Trinity***

How did you get the idea for *Stealing Trinity*?

The inspiration for *Stealing Trinity* came largely from reading about the sinking of the *USS Indianapolis*. There were a lot of peculiar things about that ship going down right at the end of World War II, not the least of which was the fact that it had just delivered the components of the Hiroshima bomb. It was a tragic historical event that begged for a conspiracy.

Start to finish, how long did it take you to write *Stealing Trinity*?

Stealing Trinity took about a year to write. There was a fair amount of research involved regarding the Manhattan Project.

Why did you choose World War II as the time period?

Like many people, I've always been fascinated by World War II. It was my father's war, and, I think, the only true "world" war. There were battles in Africa, South America, the IndoPacific, Alaska—everyone on earth was affected.

How did you get the ideas for the characters?

I tried to design characters that fit the times. The story takes place at the very end of World War II, and the three main characters have seen very different sides of the war. Two of the characters have seen and felt terrible suffering, but from different vantage points. The third has led a life of privilege, and feels more than a little guilty about it.

Do you have a favorite character in *Stealing Trinity*, and if so, who, and why?

My favorite character has to be the antagonist. He is a German soldier who is recruited as a spy. The man has seen the bloodiest battles of a very bloody war, yet as the story progresses, he tries to transition virtually overnight into the bosom of a wealthy family in Newport, Rhode Island I know firsthand that veterans can have a hard time readapting to civilian life—I wanted to take this conflict to an extreme

Do you have a least favorite character? If so, who, and why?

Without a doubt, it would be the only non-fictional character in the book. Lavrenti Beria was the head of Stalin's secret police, the NKVD. He was a man who, in real life, was credited with the extermination of millions. Not hard for a writer to make a guy like that villainous.

Was the process of writing *Stealing Trinity* different than the process of writing your debut novel, *The Perfect Assassin*?

The Perfect Assassin took much longer. Each book I write seems to come more quickly—I think because I'm getting better organized. The research and editing went more smoothly as well, I think due to lessons learned from the first book.

In addition to winning numerous awards, your debut novel, *The Perfect Assassin* received rave reviews. Did that cause you to feel any pressure as you wrote *Stealing Trinity*?

Absolutely. You always want to improve, or at least keep up a standard. A lot of people asked about a sequel to *The Perfect Assassin*. I wouldn't close the door on it, but I really liked the idea of a story that revolved around the Manhattan Project--everyone knows how important that was to our country.

How did you research the material for *Stealing Trinity*?

A number of ways. My father was in the Navy in the Pacific from 1941-45. He helped me, and of course I hit the internet and library. World War II is a well-documented war. The Manhattan Project was a little tougher, but the information that does exist was easy to adapt.

In researching the Manhattan Project, did you learn anything that surprised you?

I was surprised at the laxity of security in the Manhattan Project. The Army ran the project, and they tried to keep things tight from an operational point. What was most unusual was that so many of the project's top scientists were foreign nationals. Italian, Hungarian, German—Oppenheimer insisted on the world's best minds, regardless of where they were born. For the most part it was not a problem. So many people hated Hitler, they were glad to help.

Were there really spies in the Manhattan Project?

Yes—Harry Gold and Klaus Fuchs. And in November of 2007, the Russians announced yet another breach. They had agreed not to bring the gentleman's name to light until after he had passed away—a number of non-fiction books on this story are pending publication. Most of the vital information didn't pass until after the Nazis were defeated and the Cold War took over. Russia got her atomic capability in a fraction of the time—and at a fraction of the cost—relative to America.

Why did you include the *USS Indianapolis* tragedy in *Stealing Trinity*?

Being factual, I think the sinking of *Indianapolis* gives a good base for launching the rest of the story. I tried to create a credible conspiracy around her suspicious loss.

Of all the wars our nation fought, why do you think World War II seems to weigh the strongest on our national psyche?

Again, I think the scope. It affected virtually everyone in our country, and most of the world. Also, we were fighting an enemy who was easy to demonize. This was particularly true as we look back historically, with the horrors of mass murder so clear in evidence.

What's next for Ward Larsen?

I've come back to the present day. When I was in the Air Force, I was trained as an aircraft accident investigator. I've got a story in the works about an airplane that crashes mysteriously. Bit by bit, the investigator uncovers a terrific—and I think very plausible—plot to destabilize the Western world.